

# An Assessment of Anthropogenic Hazards in Gombe State: A Criminality Perspective

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**Abstract:** *Criminality is one societal hazard bedevilling Gombe state in the last two decades. It manifests in various forms and is being committed by individuals, political thugs and of recent, armed groups. The study has assessed the recent trends in criminality with the objectives of identifying the hot spots of criminality and the perpetrators of crime, the trends, causes and its implication for state development. The study also looked at the implications of criminality to the state's development and proffered strategies to curb it. The study was exploratory and was conducted using existing literature as its secondary source of data. Hence, data were collected from books, journals, the internet, and security reports. Unstructured interviews with the public, state security operatives, the Police Community Relation Committee, voluntary security operatives, the vigilante formed the sources of primary data. Data collected were analyzed leading to logical deductions and recommendations. The results were presented quantitatively using tables and bar charts. The results revealed that high level poverty, unemployment, drug abuse are the contributing factors to criminality in the study area. The study revealed also that the trend in criminality in the last few months were theft, armed robbery, insurgency, communal conflicts and kidnapping. The study recommends a combination of training in entrepreneurship, employment of youths, creation of security outpost in flash point areas, clamp down on illicit drug peddlers and consumers and quick dispensation of justice and public enlightenment among other ways to curb the menace of criminality.*

**Keywords:** criminality, arm robbery, hazards, theft, entrepreneurship, development

## 1. Introduction

A hazard is any activity or action physically or socially that jeopardizes human welfare and his environment ( Ibrahim, 2002). Broadly, Whrite and Boorse, (2011) defined hazard as anything that can cause injury, disease or death, damage to property and degradation of the environment. They see hazard as being classified into physical, biological, chemical and cultural hazard. Comcare (2019) defined physical hazard as "a factor within the environment that can harm the body without necessarily touching it. He further stated that vibration and noise are examples of physical hazards". Physical hazards include but aren't limited to electricity, radiation, pressure, noise, heights and vibration amongst many others. Physical hazards are processes that occur naturally without man's interference. Chemical hazards refer to the chemicals in use in different technologies and household products (Whrite and Boorse, 2011). Biological hazards are photogenes, diseases and viruses that infect man as a result of his interaction with other organisms. It is a biological substance that poses a threat to the health of living organisms, primarily humans. This could include a sample of a microorganism, virus or toxin (from a biological source) that can affect human health. A biohazard could also be a substance harmful to other animals (Harvard, 2012). Cultural hazards, also known as social hazards, result from your location, socioeconomic status, occupation, and behavioural choices. For example, smoking cigarettes is hazardous to your health, and this is a behavioural choice. If you live in a neighbourhood with lots of crime, this is a hazard based on your location. Similarly, your diet, exercise habits, and primary mode of transportation all influence your health and the health of the environment around you (Sarah, 2019). Generally however, there are two causes of hazard namely; nature (natural forces and processes) and anthropogenic (human actions/inactions and activities).

The focus of this paper is to find a solution to our environmental disasters that are to a large extent cause by anthropogenic aspect or human actions with special attention to criminality. In Nigeria Police Abstract of Statistics (NPACS), crimes are categorized into four main categories: Crime against persons which include manslaughter, murder and attempted murder, assault, rape, child stealing, grievous hurt and wounding. Crime against property includes: armed robbery, house and store breakings, forgery, theft/stealing. Crime against lawful authority which include: forgery of current notes, gambling, breach of peace, bribery and corruption. Crime against local act include: traffic offences, liquor offences, among others. In the context of this paper, criminality refers to an offences against people, offences against property, offences against constituted authority and offences against public peace at a magnitude to which constitute a crime. This paper considers an attempt to commit the act above as an offence.

The choice of the anthropogenic perspective was based on two premises: first that naturally induced environmental hazards are to a large extent are being solved by an in-built environmental mechanisms. Secondly, majority of the environmental hazards facing people in Gombe state of late are due to human actions and activities, particularly insecurity.

In recent years, particularly 2009 to 2018 there have been worrisome escalations of incidents of criminality in different parts of Gombe State. There exist a number of daunting security challenges such as drug and substance abuse, armed robbery, theft, murder, arson, rape, thuggery (kalare), banditry, kidnapping, communal clashes, terrorism (Boko Haram), and other criminal activities which continue to threaten the stability and development of many states in Nigeria including Gombe State. The menace seems to overwhelm the authorities saddled with the responsibility of securing the state.

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Criminality became terrifying as the menace continue to surge with devastating loss of lives, property and a source of injury to many people in the state. A situation where young, old men and women are killed, robbed, mired, and kidnapped demand that urgent steps need to be taken to stop or subdue. This work is undertaken by the researcher's desire for the need to articulate proactive strategies for reducing the incidences of criminality; otherwise development will continue to elude the state.

Consequently, this study seek to assess human induced hazard in form of criminality, its trends, causes, sources, and its implications to state development. At the end the study will proffer strategies to mitigate crimes so that the infrastructural development in the state will make meaning.

## 2. Objectives of the Study

The aim of this study is to assess anthropogenic disaster in Gombe state with special attention to criminality. This is intended to be studied through the following objectives

- 1) To identify the causes and perpetrators of criminality in the study area
- 2) To investigate the trends and challenges of criminality
- 3) To examine the implications of criminality to the state's development
- 4) And proffer strategies to mitigate crimes in Gombe state.

The findings of this study will unfold the real state of societal hazard in Gombe state, which may be different from

statement made by policy makers in whose domain provision of security lay. The study will also proffer a grass root solutions to the barriers that hinders the provision of security and an additional ways if when adopted will curb crime to the barest minimum.

## 3. Methodology

### 3.1 Description of the study area

Gombe State is located in the north-east region of Nigeria between latitudes  $9^{\circ} 30''$  and  $12^{\circ} 30''$  North and Longitudes  $8^{\circ} 45''$  and  $11^{\circ} 45''$  East (Figure 1). The state lies in the centre of the North-East geopolitical zone of Nigeria. It covers a total land area of only 17, 258.6 km<sup>2</sup> representing 6.3% of the 272, 395 km<sup>2</sup> of the total land area of the northeast geopolitical zone. It shares boundary with all the other states in the Zone, namely Adamawa, Taraba, Bauchi, Borno and Yobe. The 1991 census returned a population of 1, 489, 122 people for Gombe State. By 1998 and 2004 using 3.0 growth rate, it was projected to 1, 895,597 and 2, 174,118 people respectively (Abbas, 2006). By 2013, the population was projected to 3,433,593, Comprising 1,786,521 males and 1,647,072 females (NPC, 2013). The people of Gombe are primarily farmers producing food and cash crops. In terms of trade and commerce, the state has a lot of markets that operate weekly, bi-weekly and on daily basis.

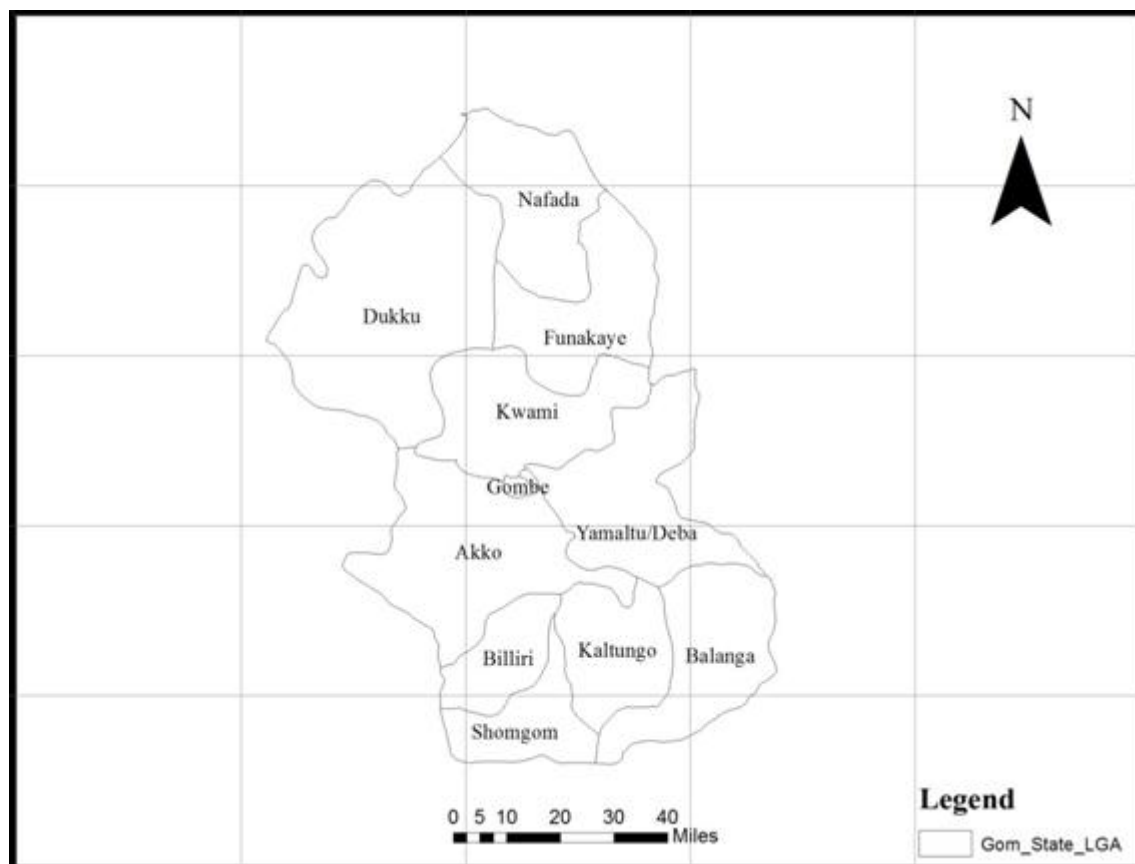


Figure 1: Political Map of Gombe State

### 3.2 Data collection and Analysis

The data collected for this study involved the following: Data describing anthropogenic disaster in form of societal hazards with special attention to criminality in the study area. Information on this data was obtained from unstructured interview, security reports, books, journals, and the internet; data describing trends of criminality in the study area. Information on this was obtained from unstructured interview with knowledgeable persons, the Police Public Relation Committee, the public and nongovernmental security outfits; data describing areas that are most prone to crimes in the study area. Information on this was obtained from the police, nongovernmental security outfits.

The major materials used for this study were maps of Gombe State, the internet, books, journals, pamphlets, publications, and unstructured interviews. The last two constitute the primary source of information of this study, while the first six form the secondary source of data. Primary source of the data include unstructured interviews with relevant and knowledgeable persons such as the police public relation committee members, the 2i/c, NDLEA state command, the public and vigilante members. Finally, traditional rulers and leaders of civil society organizations were interviewed to cover a broad spectrum of contributors and opinions in the study area. The data collected were analyzed and presented using descriptive form.

## 4. Results and Discussions

### 4.1 Crimes, Causes and Perpetrators

Crime is part of human behaviour, and since humans are faced with complex interactions of social, economic, cultural, genetic, psychological and environmental factors, it is very difficult to link criminality to a single factor (U.K. Essay, 2018). Crimes are committed at different places at different times and for different reasons (Danbazau, 2007). Here are some causes of crimes:

- a) Biogenetic factor: Criminologists are with the opinion that criminal activity is due to the effect of biologically caused or inherited factors (Pratt and Cullen, 2000). According to Lombrose (1911), a criminal is born, not made; that criminals were the products of a genetic constitution unlike that found in the non-criminal population. However the study has not linked any offender to this factor. In order to do that a family background of criminals would have to be examined
- b) Opportunity and Desire: where exists laxity in curbing criminal activities, an opportunity will be created for people with criminal intent to perpetrate their heinous activities. Any country or region that allows it borders to be porous is liable to face an influx of criminal elements from a more secured environment. Having specialises in crime and mixing up with locals who have a desire to indulge in crime, a rate of criminality will increase. This study has discovered during interview that political activities and politicians hire miscreants as thugs during campaigns and elections. This creates opportunity for criminals to engage in crimes.

- c) Social and Environmental factor: One major discovery has been that virtually all of us form our moral standards from those with whom we come into closest contact during our formative years. We behave as do the people we like and admire, because we are eager to have their respect. That is why most of our elementary ways of thinking and living are formed by our home and neighbour-hood contacts. If by chance some among us do not have the skills, wealth, connection and education to live the life of our heroes, a criminal means will be explored.
- d) Poverty and slum life with it causes are not the only sources of crime. Sometimes lack of intelligence or a disordered mind is responsible. Sometimes the emotional life of an individual is warped by conflicts, the nature of which we do not yet fully understand. Sometimes the very punishments we impose upon an offender stir up the rebellions side of his nature and turn him into a confirmed criminal instead of reforming him. Sometimes the spectacle of supposed leaders of the community enriching themselves by graft or financial manipulations leads to a cynical lowering of moral standards on the part of the rest of us (America Historical Association, 2017).

Some other underlying causes of crimes are: population growth, climate-change, youth bulge, unemployment, access to education, access to economic opportunities, among others. However, this study has identified the following as the key security issues/challenges facing Gombe State such as armed robbery, theft, murder, arson, rape, thuggery (kalare), banditry, kidnapping, communal clashes, terrorism (Boko Haram), drug addiction/substance abuse and other criminal activities which continue to threaten the stability and development of many states in Nigeria including Gombe State

## 5. Trends and Security Challenges

### 5.1 Crimes in Gombe State

For the purpose of this study, crime is simply defined as any action or omission which constitutes an offence punishable by law. Crimes are frequently classified as crimes against persons such as murder, rape, assault, kidnapping, intimidation, theft, abduction, breach of trust and many more. Crime can be against the state such as embezzlement of public funds, breach of public trust and abuse of office. Another form of crime is crime against property which includes burglary, larceny, auto theft, indiscriminate felling of trees and illegal mining. Other crimes are: crime against public decency, drunkenness, drug abuse, vagrancy, disorderly conduct, traffic violation, etc.

From the statistics obtained by State Security Committee from the Police, the most prevalent crimes in Gombe State in the last 2 years are crime against property in the form of theft, house breaking, store breaking, phone snatching, forgery, hurt and vehicles theft and snatching. The reported case of this type of crime in 2017 was 12,874 across the state. The figure dropped in 2018 to 9, 416. By June 2019, the figure begins to rise again due to political campaigns. Crime against persons in a form of culpable homicide,

armed robbery, rape, kidnapping, breach of trust, grievous hurts, deformation of character and mischief follow. Other crimes include: suicide, possession of drugs and illicit substances, disturbance of public peace, and possession of dangerous weapons, etc.

Stealing is taking a new dimension in the study area. The trend now is the use of violence at night and in the broad daylight where criminals use violence and move in groups of 15-20. Armed youths create and exploit fear through threat and use of knives and cutlasses designed to instil fear in and intimidate people, often targeting non-combatants. The perpetrators of these criminal act, according to Casebeer and Thomas (2002), if not checked in time could grow into terrorist organisation.

## **6. Implications of Crime to State's Development**

Since 1999 insecurity in Gombe state has been a major anthropogenic disaster as a result of criminality. The disaster seems to defy different strategies put forward by policy makers to curtail. Criminality like kalare activities perpetrated by different armed groups and political foes has impeded the enjoyment of development brought by the dividend of democracy. This study has examined the implications as is affects education, economy, politics and culture.

### **6.1 Economic implications**

The state has been blacklisted as one of the hazardous states in Nigeria by virtue of its location in the epicentre of insurgency in the northeast, or one in which the activities of Boko Haram has rendered unsafe. The economic implication of this is that local and foreign investors will not consider investing in the state for fear of loss. It is a well known fact that businesses thrive best in a secured and peaceful environment. According to Newswatch magazine (2012), Boko Haram unleashed mayhem in all the state in the northeast and beyond. The death toll as at then was over 700 and thousands more has been rendered homeless, while many have been forced to exile. This affected population and invariably demand for goods and services that could boost the economy of the affected areas, Gombe state inclusive. Furthermore, people who should have contributed ideas and proffered solutions to national problems and paid taxes to the government for economic development died due to the blast (Ude, and Ihedie, 2013).

### **6.2 Political implications**

The political implication resulting from criminality and other cultural hazards impinges on the continuity of government policies and programmes. The activities of kalare thugs which results into injury, loss of life and property are vices the government must deal with though no appropriation was made to it. When Boko Haram struck in Gombe on 24<sup>th</sup> February, 2012 and 14<sup>th</sup> February, 2015, it destabilised Government programmes. Thus, when the political system is unstable as a result of crisis, the government in power is distracted from pursuing its goal of transforming the country and moving it to the next level.

This is because rather than focus on the agenda of government in power, government will be compelled to channel all her energy and resources to augment security at the expense of other social goods that should be delivered to the people (Ude, and Ihedie, 2013). For example, Gombe State government has biffed up security in 2011 by engaging 2, 864 vigilante groups at the cost of N14million per month. The state also provided and installed a radio communication gadget to the Gombe state police command at the cost of N206, 635million. Thirdly, additional N288, 431, 224 was expended in 2015 for installation of tracking device for the DSS (Security committee, 2019). These and more expenditure are the cost of cultural hazards being incurred by the state government of which constitutionally are the preserve of the federal government.

### **6.3 Impacts on education**

There is currently an upsurge in children enrolment in schools in Gombe state as a result of the influx of IDPs from neighbouring states. According to annual school census report by the Gombe state ministry of education, there was an increase of 22,639 children enrolled in public schools between 2015 and 2016. The enrolment between 2016 and 2017 increased to 24, 600. This impact negatively on education resources that is barely adequate. The situation now in many schools in Gombe is over-crowd of pupils in classes. The repercussion is a long term impact of quality (Danlami, 2018). And as mentioned earlier, some schools in northern Gombe state have been shut down since 2011 to forestall abduction of school children and are yet to re-open except some skeletal services in some of them.

## **7. Strategies to Tackle Cultural Hazards Challenges in Gombe State**

A lot of literature have put forward ways of curbing criminality. The Strategies forwarded are sort of general ways of solving crimes. However, physical, social, economic and temporal settings differ from one place to another. It is therefore imperative for each location to device its unique ways of solving its environmental problem at a certain place and at a particular time. The following strategies are suggested for the current spate of cultural hazards in Gombe state.

- 1) Fight against drugs and substance abuse through:
  - a) Creation of state wide drug control committees at state, local and wards levels.
  - b) Carry out and sustain sensitization on the dangers of drugs and substance abuse.
  - c) Sustain intelligent gathering on production, sales and supply of drugs to Gombe state communities.
  - d) Support agencies responsible for drug management and consumption
- 2) Consider training and re-training in entrepreneurship to target youths to provide jobs.
- 3) Create more police outposts to cater for unmanned areas vulnerable to crimes in all the state.
- 4) Employ and train more vigilante groups to complement police effort in curbing crime.
- 5) Monitor all routes through which criminals infiltrate Gombe state and enter into synergy with other states in the Northeast to curb insurgency.

- 6) Carryout and sustain efforts in security awareness among all citizens.

## 8. Conclusion

This study has examined the anthropogenic hazards in Gombe State with special reference to criminality and its implications on economic, social and political development of the state. The study has also looked at the causes of criminality in the state. The study discovered that reasons responsible for the cultural hazards are drugs and substance abuse, political thuggery and insurgency among others. Kalare miscreants and other criminals have negatively affected the security and peace in the state leading to loss of lives and property akin to other physical hazards that affect our environment. The study has also looked at the trends and the magnitude of the negative vices and discovered that crime against property ranked first in the array of criminality in the state followed by theft, political thuggery then insurgency. Moreover, the study looked at the implication of all these vices and discovered that they are inimical to the social, economic and democratic development of the state. Some home grown strategies were suggested to mitigate criminality in Gombe state. These include: fight against drugs and substance abuse, training and re-training in entrepreneurship to provide jobs, establishment of more police outposts to cater for unmanned and areas vulnerable to crime, and sustained efforts in security awareness to all citizens among other recommendations.

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